



WAMHS Newsletter

“When the world is struck with a catastrophic event, the instinct to shield our children from the effects of it is completely understandable. We want them to grow up believing that the world is pure and good and geared in their favour. We also want them to feel safe, and avoiding a discussion isn’t necessarily the way to make this happen” Karen Young¹

The world has been a very scary place during the last few months and understandably children are feeling worried and afraid. This newsletter focuses on ideas that may be helpful when speaking with children about their fears and worries, and strategies for supporting them to manage during these uncertain times.

What are typical childhood worries?

Younger children - fear of the dark, monsters, animals, ghosts, witches, losing their loved ones.

Older children - these worries increase as children notice the world around them e.g. worrying about natural disasters, being more exposed to the news, rejection, danger and social situations.

Other family and community experiences may also be a huge worry for them.

Where to begin?

We're all different and will respond to things in different ways - let them know that whatever they're feeling is completely okay. It is crucial to give children positive experiences of telling us how they feel so that they are encouraged to do this more often.

It can be helpful to think about a time when you felt upset and when you spoke to someone - what helped? What didn't help?

Let children know that what they're feeling makes sense – try to avoid saying things like “don't be silly” or “there's nothing to be worried about”

Don't feel like you need to fix things or have all the answers – lots of things that are happening right now aren't easy to fix, so instead listen and be available. Let them know that they can come to you with questions, ideas, thoughts and feelings. Give extra cuddles or read an extra story. Let them know that you are there if they need you.

Questions that might be helpful to ask...

I've noticed you don't seem your usual self...

Do you want to talk about it?

I wonder if you might need help right now to feel a bit better/calmer/safer

It seems like you are feeling...

This sounds really important, I can't talk about it right now so can we talk about it in 10 minutes/this evening, please?



Containment

Containment is where a person **receives and understands the emotional communication of another without being overwhelmed by it** then communicates this back to the other person. This process is crucial to avoid children becoming “full up” with difficult emotions.

How do we contain children?

Look for clues about these feelings

Active listening: let them talk without interruption, focus on what is being said, show your interest by nodding and commenting on what is being said

Name what you see or hear from them - they need to know you get it

“I can see you’re feeling scared. It is completely understandable. It is a frightening thing to happen.”

BUBBLE BREATHING



Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Begin by imagining you are holding a bubble wand. Breathe in deeply and then, as you breathe out slowly and gently, imagine you are blowing bubbles into the room. Imagine the bubbles are filled with peace or love or happiness and that you are filling the whole room with a peaceful, happy feeling. As you keep breathing slowly and blowing your imaginary bubbles, feel your body become calm and relaxed.

Modelling

Children look up to adults to be their role model. This is why it is important for us to be their emotional role model

- Talk about your own emotions
- Share some strategies you use e.g. deep breathing, stretching, talking to friends, being creative
- Make these conversations about emotions and feelings a normal conversation

It's okay to let them know that you are sad for people that are hurting during these difficult times, sharing this with your child will nurture their empathy and compassion – but it is also helpful for them to see your resilience, your capacity to cope with the news and look after your own wellbeing.

Make a worry box



Create the box: any box will work there is no need to buy something new

Encourage your child to decorate the box as they would like.

Talk about it: explain to your child that this is a special place where they can put away their worries each night and let your child choose a place in the room where the box will be kept safe each night (not in their room as this is their safe place)

You could both write some worries down to start with to model this and then fold the paper and put them into the box.

Try to spend five minutes each night before bedtime where your child can discuss their worries.

¹ Karen Young – How to Talk to Kids and Teens About World Trauma (www.heysigmund.com)